

His kiss 701

Chapter 701

Wesley offered no denial, his smile confirming her suspicions. “You noticed?”

Though her heart leaped with happiness, Miriam maintained her direct manner. “The way you watch her carries even more tenderness than Stewart once showed. Your grandmother remains so captivated by Truett that she’s missed the entire transformation.”

Wesley filed away this detail about Stewart’s past behavior but remained silent.

Miriam pressed, “So when will you two exchange vows?”

Uncertain whether he would survive to see another year, Wesley could only respond with calculated vagueness. “We don’t want to jump into marriage too quickly.”

Miriam’s dissatisfaction rang clear. “With a treasure like Gabriela before you, what could possibly hold you back? If you love her, marry her immediately!”

Wesley shook his head. “But I’ve only just assumed my position at Moss Group headquarters...”

“You can wed and build your career simultaneously.” Miriam’s voice carried the weight of genuine concern. “Wesley, your grandmother once sought guidance about your future. A fortune teller warned of a terrible calamity awaiting you at thirty-three. Do you remember?”

Wesley nodded, his smile gentle but skeptical. "Such predictions hold truth only for those who choose to believe."

"How can you dismiss this?" Miriam's earnestness intensified. "The fortune teller assured your grandmother that Gabriela is your good-luck charm—the only way to be safe is to marry her."

Seeing Wesley apparently stunned into silence, Miriam felt a surge of satisfaction. "Now you seem to believe it."

Wesley finally realized why his grandmother was so eager to unite him with Gabriela.

He released a quiet laugh, his voice carrying genuine conviction. "I believe you're right."

"If you truly believe, then don't waste precious time. Your thirty-third birthday arrives with the year's end." Miriam's tone grew urgent. "Marriage will bring your grandmother peace and help you navigate this dangerous passage safely."

Wesley inclined his head in agreement. "I understand."

Miriam posed one final question. "Should Loretta learn that you and Gabriela are together?"

She had observed their careful discretion, wondering if they planned to wait until after their wedding to share the truth with his grandmother.

Wesley preferred to keep Loretta in the dark for now. If his condition proved incurable, she might still pressure Gabriela to remain bound to him.

He sighed. "We'll maintain our secrecy a while longer."

Miriam shook her head knowingly. "You've already declared your relationship publicly—even your grandfather has heard the news. Loretta may not move in these social circles, but word will reach her soon enough."

Wesley acknowledged the inevitable with a resigned nod. "Then we'll let events reveal themselves naturally."

After their conversation concluded, Wesley returned to the bedroom, his gaze settling on Gabriela with unusual tenderness.

Gabriela noticed that immediately. "Do I have something stuck to my face?"

"Today, I discovered you would bring me good luck, Gabriela." Wesley's laughter bubbled up as he shared Miriam's earlier revelations about the fortune teller's predictions.

Rather than joining his amusement, Gabriela responded with startling seriousness. "Then we should marry tomorrow."

She had no way of knowing if the fortune teller was right, but she wouldn't hesitate to embrace any action that might strengthen Wesley's chances for recovery.

Wesley reached out to pinch her nose playfully. "Joining the Moss family requires surviving the judgment of countless scrutinizing eyes..."

"Are you saying we can't marry?" Gabriela's steady gaze searched his face. "Or do you simply not want me as your wife?"

Wesley paused at her words.

Of course he wanted to marry her.

Five years had passed since he first glimpsed her curious face peering around the hospital room doorway, and even then, he had longed to make her his bride.

The wanting had consumed him for years.

He drew her against his chest with sudden, fierce urgency. "Let's marry tomorrow."

Once she became his wife, she would belong to him completely.

Chapter 702

The next morning, Wesley escorted Gabriela to the old stone church.

Inside, a wedding ceremony unfolded before them, and the sacred atmosphere wrapped around them like an embrace.

Wesley clasped Gabriela's hand and guided her to the courtyard outside.

His voice carried a tender vulnerability as he spoke. "Gabriela, my condition remains uncertain, and I cannot offer you the elaborate celebration you deserve. Today, let us stand beneath this sky and pledge ourselves to each other. Will you marry me?"

Gabriela recognized the weight behind Wesley's quiet desperation and answered with unwavering resolve, "Yes."

The ceremony's grandeur held no importance; becoming his wife was everything that mattered.

She clung to Loretta's words about the fortune teller's prophecy, praying that marriage would indeed bring the blessing they desperately needed.

Wesley withdrew the rings he had treasured for what felt like an eternity.

These rings bore extraordinary significance, crafted after that transformative night they had shared in room 1205.

The design showcased two delicate leaves intertwined in an eternal dance, each adorned with carefully placed diamonds. While not extravagant in price, they remained absolutely unique in all the world.

No other pair existed anywhere.

The custom rings had accompanied him for nearly two years, and finally, the moment had arrived to present them.

Wesley's expression grew reverent, his striking features taut with nervous anticipation yet radiating unmistakable joy.

From within the church, the sacred marriage vows drifted through the air.

The priest's voice reached them clearly. "Do you take this woman as your lawful wife, to love and cherish her, through sickness and health, to honor and protect her, remaining faithful until your final breath?"

"I do," Wesley declared, his gaze locked with Gabriela's as he carefully placed the ring upon her left finger.

The priest then directed the same solemn question to the bride, and Gabriela responded with conviction. "I do."

They completed the exchange of rings, and Wesley swept her into his embrace, his laughter ringing with pure elation.

"There, now you belong to me completely. Even when I travel abroad for treatment, you cannot escape my hold on your heart."

Gabriela found no humor in his teasing words. After a moment of stunned silence, she recovered her voice.

"Wesley, what exactly are you suggesting? You have no intention of taking me overseas?"

"That's correct." Wesley regarded her with infinite tenderness. "Will you remain here and wait for my return?"

“Absolutely not!” Gabriela pushed against his chest in protest. “Wherever your journey leads, I intend to follow.”

“But what about Truett?” Wesley’s voice grew persuasive and gentle. “Truett remains so young and requires his mother’s—”

Just as Gabriela prepared to argue, Wesley continued his reasoning.

“Do not suggest that Farley could assume that responsibility, because regardless of his devotion to Truett, he cannot replace a mother’s irreplaceable love. My absence may extend three months, perhaps even a year or two. How could Truett endure such separation from his mother? Furthermore, I remain uncertain whether the treatment will rob me of my hair. I am far too vain to allow you to witness such deterioration.”

Chapter 703

Gabriela’s laughter mixed with the tears that began streaming down her cheeks. “My husband stands as the most magnificent man in existence. Even should you lose every strand of hair and each eyebrow, you would still remain perfect in my eyes.”

“That changes nothing,” Wesley replied firmly. “You also know Stewart quite well—wealthy, refined, and undeniably attractive. What if my altered appearance causes you to question your feelings and consider him instead?”

Would the specter of Stewart never fade from their conversations?

Gabriela felt frustration and heartache collide within her chest.

She longed to strike him but feared causing damage to his fragile heart, so she settled for pounding his arm instead.

“Your constant references to him make me suspect you harbor feelings for the man!”

Wesley appeared genuinely shocked. “Gabriela, you understand my preferences better than anyone alive. How could such a disturbing thought enter your mind?”

“Because you persist in mentioning Stewart’s name!” Gabriela was angry.

“I wish I could avoid it, but you once praised his wealth and gentle nature and...” Wesley argued.

“Stop this instant!” Gabriela demanded, now thoroughly exasperated.

Despite her fierce resistance, Wesley’s playful persuasion, combined with thoughts of their vulnerable child and his unwavering determination, ultimately convinced her to remain in Okburg and await his eventual return.

While Gabriela and Wesley celebrated their improvised wedding, chaos erupted at the Howard mansion.

Although Gabriela had secured Beverley's solemn promise to avoid interfering in Lauren's predicament, Lauren's sudden arrest ignited Herman's explosive fury. He burst through the Howard estate's doors, stormed in, evidence clutched in his shaking hand.

"Beverley, did you not guarantee that Gabriela would show mercy? Instead, Lauren now sits behind bars!"

Beverley responded with calculated resignation in her tone, "Gabriela possesses such fierce stubbornness and refuses to heed my counsel. My influence over her has reached its limits."

Beverley harbored deep resentment toward her inability to manipulate Gabriela and deliberately placed all blame squarely upon her granddaughter's shoulders.

Herman, consumed by blazing rage, abandoned all pretense of civility and roared his accusations. "Even as an illegitimate child, she remains your blood! How dare she openly defy your authority?"

"She has displayed such defiance since her earliest years," Beverley sighed with theatrical weariness. "This girl knows no fear and shows incredible audacity, particularly with Wesley's absolute support behind her. She treats Lauren's situation as beneath her concern."

Beverley spoke these words with brutal honesty, making no effort to shield Gabriela from Herman's wrath.

Since controlling Gabriela had proven impossible, she decided to unleash Herman's methods upon her instead.

Chapter 704

His techniques lacked any semblance of gentleness, and when Gabriela finally experienced true suffering, she would comprehend the Howard family's power and prestige.

Upon hearing Beverley's complete abdication of responsibility, Herman slammed his evidence onto the polished table and demanded answers. "Then what course of action do we pursue now?"

Beverley's eyes betrayed the slightest flicker of calculation.

She had already positioned a willing scapegoat to shoulder responsibility for the materials swap incident, rendering Herman's threats completely powerless.

Moreover—

"Herman, the Howard family possesses no knowledge of any materials swap. However, if you insist on pursuing this investigation, I possess the means to trace the true orchestrator."

Should they choose that path, the McCoy family would find no sanctuary from the consequences.

The investigation would inevitably lead to their mutual annihilation.

She maintained an expression of perfect serenity. "Age may have touched me, but I've kept myself sharp—mentally and physically. I have not forgotten the skills that once served me so effectively."

Regarding influence and connections, the McCoy family paled in comparison to Beverley's extensive network.

Herman's face contorted as anger warred with genuine fear beneath his skin.

He ultimately gathered his evidence and delivered his words with icy precision. "Beverley, surely you jest. We stand as family through marriage, and destroying one destroys us both. I shall not pursue such dangerous jokes again."

Beverley acknowledged his retreat with cool indifference. "Precisely my thoughts."

"However, I refuse to allow Gabriela to escape consequences," Herman declared with renewed venom. "I trust you will not fault me for overstepping boundaries within your family."

Beverley responded with another emotionless nod. "You may proceed with her as you see fit."

With those words, she made her complete abandonment of Gabriela's protection abundantly clear.

Herman departed the Howard estate and drove directly to Gabriela's company, determined to create havoc.

He had reached a definitive conclusion: if Gabriela refused to show mercy regarding Lauren's situation, he would orchestrate the Haynes Group's complete financial collapse.

Upon his arrival at the Haynes Group headquarters, however, he discovered Gabriela's conspicuous absence.

The receptionist provided him with limited information. "Ms. Hayes appeared briefly this morning but departed in considerable haste."

Herman dispatched an associate to investigate her whereabouts and soon learned that Gabriela had received an invitation to visit Presley.

Furthermore, Presley had extended invitations to numerous influential figures throughout their social circle, including Mason and former leadership from Vasquez Group, Williams Group, Dewitt Group, and Moss Group.

Several distinguished figures from the art world had also honored the gathering with their presence, demonstrating their profound respect.

Only Roger from the Moss Group had declined to attend personally, sending his butler to represent the family's token acknowledgment.

Herman's eyelid developed an involuntary twitch of unease. This elaborate gathering at Crawford Manor carried implications far beyond simple social courtesy!

Chapter 705

Herman's operatives lacked access to Presley's estate, leaving them with a single option: maintain relentless surveillance from the shadows.

"Whatever decision Presley reaches, I must know the instant it happens," he instructed.

"Understood, sir," his man replied.

The invitation to visit Presley's estate caught Gabriela completely off guard.

She stepped through the entrance to discover the living room filled with guests, predominantly older figures who carried themselves with unmistakable authority.

Their penetrating gazes and composed bearing commanded immediate respect—hallmarks of those who wielded true power.

Matthew's presence among them surprised her most of all.

Beyond Matthew and Mason, however, she recognized virtually no one, and even those familiar faces were nothing more than passing acquaintances.

She approached Presley with careful politeness.

"I'm curious why you asked me here today, Mrs. Crawford."

"Gabriela, you made it!" Presley rose gracefully, guiding her around the room for introductions to each guest. "Meet Mr. Williams, and here we have Mr. Dewitt..."

The introductions revealed a startling truth—aside from Roger, Okburg's entire elite had assembled under one roof.

Gabriela did not understand what scheme Presley was orchestrating. The other guests harbored the same bewilderment.

Wesley's influence ensured they all knew Gabriela as the woman destined to become Wesley's wife.

Given Presley's formidable reputation, they treated Gabriela with calculated courtesy.

Once the introductions concluded, Presley settled into the head chair and addressed Gabriela with surprising gentleness.

“My mother and I spent considerable time discussing this over recent days, and we’ve decided I should take you as my protégé. Does this interest you?”

Her tone carried such casual warmth.

Several heartbeats later, those words detonated like a carefully placed explosive in everyone’s consciousness. Absolute silence claimed the room.

Gabriela, utterly blindsided, managed only a hollow echo. “Protégé?”

Presley’s smile widened. “Precisely. You’ll study design under my guidance from this moment forward. I intend to share every technique I’ve mastered.”

Disbelief colored Gabriela’s stammered response. “But why?”

Okburg teemed with young people who possessed sharper intellects than hers, and countless others boasted far superior connections. What had driven Presley to select her?

“Simple enough,” Presley replied, her smile never wavering. “I choose you because intelligence radiates from you—and because you’ve captured my affection.”

She chuckled softly. “Stop standing there like a statue. If you agree, let’s make this official.”

Every person in the room sat frozen in stunned silence.

Presley had always remained an enigma within high society circles. Most people failed to truly understand her nature, yet all approached her with extreme caution.

Throughout the years, several ambitious young talents had pursued her mentorship, convinced their abilities warranted her attention. She had dismissed every single one without ceremony.

No one had anticipated she would act so decisively today.

Judging by the shock painted across Gabriela’s features, this ceremony hadn’t been prearranged.

Presley simply embodied that level of spontaneity.

After mere seconds of hesitation, Gabriela moved closer to Presley. She accepted the elaborate bouquet the butler had prepared and presented it with both hands, offering it to Presley with solemn reverence.

Presley received it with an expression of pure delight. Gabriela then spoke with crystal clarity.

“Being chosen as your protégé brings me tremendous honor.”

Years of enduring pressure from Marie and Phyllis had taught Gabriela the invaluable importance of powerful allies. Presley represented not only influence but also warmth and accessibility as a mentor.

Since Gabriela had always found joy in creative work and design, becoming Presley’s student felt like destiny aligning perfectly.

Presley then placed a small pair of golden scissors in Gabriela’s hands and announced with radiant satisfaction, “From this day forward, you stand as my one and only protégé.”

Gabriela accepted the scissors with both hands, in profound gratitude. “Thank you with all my heart, Mrs. Crawford.”

The initiation reached its completion in that simple exchange.

The entire ceremony had consumed less than thirty minutes.

Even the veteran power brokers in attendance, individuals who had witnessed every conceivable scenario, found themselves rendered speechless.

The two women shared remarkable similarities in temperament—both decisive, both spontaneous.

Something as momentous as a mentorship required no lengthy deliberation. One moment it remained uncertain, the next, it was carved in stone.

While some guests reeled from shock, others felt genuine happiness for Gabriela's good fortune.

Mason approached her first, placing a kind hand on her shoulder. "Gabriela, today's announcement caught me completely unprepared, so I came without a gift. I'll remedy that oversight very soon."

Gabriela offered him her heartfelt thanks.

Matthew, witnessing his daughter's recognition by an internationally renowned designer, swelled with pride and longed to express his joy as Mason had done.

However, the fractured relationship between Gabriela and the Howard family held him back in painful hesitation.

Other guests, though less familiar with Gabriela personally, offered polite words of congratulation.

Following the ceremony, Presley hosted an exquisite dinner, expressing her deep appreciation to everyone gathered at her table.

After the evening concluded, news of Gabriela's elevation to Presley's protégé spread like wildfire throughout the city, reaching even Herman's ears without requiring any investigation.

Although Presley had orchestrated no grand spectacle, the assembly of Okburg's most powerful figures served to transform Gabriela's standing in society.

Who would dare antagonize Presley's chosen protégé now?

Herman certainly possessed too much wisdom to risk such folly.

Gabriela lingered at the estate well into the evening, absorbing design principles from Presley's vast reservoir of knowledge.

When she finally departed, darkness had claimed the sky past nine o'clock, and she discovered Matthew stationed outside like a patient sentinel.

His black Porsche wore a crown of fallen leaves that had drifted down during his vigil.

The moment he spotted her, Matthew's eyes ignited with unmistakable joy, and he approached with hurried steps.

"Gabriela."

Gabriela hesitated, uncertain how to address this man who occupied such complicated territory in her heart, and managed to give a slight nod.

"Presley choosing you as her protégé never crossed my mind. You continue to amaze me, Gabriela," Matthew said.

Matthew's desperate act to save her had fundamentally altered Gabriela's perception of him, and his arm still bore bandages from that sacrifice.

Yet the whirlwind of recent events had consumed her attention—pursuing legal action against Lauren, clashing with Beverley, and weathering Cindy's volatile outbursts at the company.

Her deteriorating relationship with the Howard family had forced her to maintain careful distance from all its members.

But Matthew's expression radiated such genuine warmth and eager hope that something softened within Gabriela's chest. The silver threading through his temples awakened an inexplicable melancholy that settled over her heart.

She offered him a gentle smile. "Thank you."

Matthew's spirits soared at this simple gesture of gratitude. "Gabriela, allow me to drive you home."

"That's not necessary..." Gabriela began, intending to mention Wesley's planned arrival.

But Matthew pressed forward with quiet determination. "I'd like to visit Truett."

Gabriela swallowed her refusal and nodded with newfound understanding. "Of course, thank you."

She slipped into Matthew's passenger seat and quickly messaged Wesley, informing him his services were no longer needed.

Throughout the journey, Matthew attempted to weave conversation between them.

Though Gabriela's responses remained economical, Matthew treasured each exchange as the most precious moments he'd experienced in years.

The villa materialized before them with surprising swiftness.

Matthew and Gabriela emerged from the vehicle and walked together toward the residential complex, their footsteps creating a synchronized rhythm on the pavement.

Neither detected Jasper's presence as he maintained his surveillance from a shadowed corner nearby.

The darkness embraced him so completely that he had become virtually invisible to casual observation.

Luther positioned himself behind Jasper, his voice barely rising above a whisper. "Gabriela and Matthew appear to have discovered much better harmony between them now."

Chapter 707

Jasper stayed wordless, his gaze tracing the sway of Gabriela's slender silhouette.

Her high ponytail flicked with each step, catching the glow of the streetlights like strands spun from silver.

Gabriela was breathtaking, down to the way her hair seemed designed to suit his every preference.

And yet, fate had drawn their lines on opposite sides, leaving them bound as rivals.

When Matthew and Gabriela stepped into the villa, they found Truett already fast asleep.

A pang of disappointment flickered across Matthew's face. After all the coaxing it had taken for Gabriela to finally let him visit his grandson, the boy was already tucked away in dreams.

Still, Matthew quickly brightened. There was always tomorrow, wasn't there?

He lingered in the living room for over half an hour, downing cup after cup of coffee—three, perhaps four—without the slightest intention of leaving.

At last, Farley spoke up, his tone polite but edged with firmness. "Mr. Howard, it's late. Gabriela needs her rest."

The words soured Matthew's mood. Why should Farley, of all people, presume to drive him out?

He was Gabriela's father, and that alone should grant him every right to be here.

He turned his gaze on Gabriela, eyes heavy with a quiet plea.

Farley, unsettled by the sight of a middle-aged man looking so pitiful, finally relented with a sigh. "Mr. Howard, perhaps Gabriela can walk you out."

Gabriela rose to her feet at once, but Matthew suddenly clutched his stomach with a pained expression.

After a trip to the restroom, he returned to the sofa and sat down again, showing no intention of leaving.

Gabriela pressed her fingers to her forehead, exasperated.

“Should I call your driver to come pick you up?”

Her relationship with the Howard family was already strained. If Matthew insisted on staying overnight, Rebecca would no doubt arrive tomorrow looking for trouble.

Gabriela was not afraid of a confrontation, but the thought of dealing with the nuisance wearied her.

“My driver is an old man,” Matthew said with feigned concern. “He’s probably asleep by now. I wouldn’t want to disturb him.”

What a flimsy excuse. Gabriela had no words.

With the Howard family’s influence, summoning another driver would have been the easiest thing in the world.

“You seem to be in real pain,” she replied coolly. “Why don’t I take you to the hospital instead?”

No matter what excuse he tried, she had already resolved not to let him stay.

Realizing he could not press further, Matthew shot Farley a few frosty looks before leaving in obvious displeasure.

Farley, however, was left completely baffled by the exchange.

At last, Matthew was gone.

Gabriela retreated upstairs, stretched out on her bed, and sent Wesley a message. “Are you still up?”

Wesley had been staying at the manor these days.

With his departure abroad drawing near, he could not bring himself to leave Loretta unattended, haunted by the thought that he might not return to care for her again.

When Gabriela’s message arrived, he had just finished the soup Loretta had prepared. His lips curved into a faint smile as he typed back.

“Wide awake. By the way, congratulations!”

Chapter 708

Gabriela grinned at her screen. “Aren’t you even a bit surprised? That’s Presley Crawford, an international design icon and now my mentor!”

Wesley could picture her smug little expression as clearly as if she were in front of him. His chest warmed.

“You are one in a million. These things don’t surprise me anymore,” he typed back with a smile.

They lingered over a few more exchanges before bidding each other goodnight.

Afterward, Wesley sent Presley a short message. “Thank you.”

Presley’s reply came almost instantly. “No need for thanks. Gabriela truly impressed me. I accepted her as my apprentice because I wanted to, not because of you. Did you really think your title alone could sway me?”

A quiet laugh escaped Wesley. Of course not. His woman needed no favors. She was remarkable in her own right.

Once Gabriela formally acknowledged Presley as her mentor, Herman no longer dared to move against her. His only recourse was to hire a top lawyer, clinging to the hope of securing Lauren's release.

But with evidence stacked against her, Lauren's conviction was all but guaranteed unless someone interfered.

At the first trial, she was sentenced to one year and six months, deepening the rift between Gabriela and the McCoy family.

With these matters settled, and Gabriela now shielded by both Presley and Brett, Wesley could finally breathe easier. With only three days left before his appointment with Gale, he decided to leave for Athea ahead of schedule.

On the eve of his departure, Gabriela stayed at his apartment. She tossed and turned, unable to rest, fussing over his suitcase and checking it again and again.

"The weather will turn cold soon. Athea is damp and chilly, so you need to bring extra warm clothes. And don't forget your medicine, you know your heart is weak..."

Watching her anxious expression, Wesley felt both tender and pained.

He gently pulled her up from the floor, a smile tugging at his lips. "Gabriela, I'm going there for treatment. The doctors will give me the best care and the finest medication. I'll have a skilled driver, a bodyguard, and an assistant by my side. You don't need to worry about me."

“Are you sure you can’t bring Billy with you?” Gabriela pressed.

Only with Billy by his side could she feel at ease, for he was the one person she trusted to manage everything flawlessly.

Wesley nodded. “Billy has to stay behind to watch over the company. Brenden is still green, and he needs Billy’s guidance.”

Gabriela nestled against his chest, her eyes rimmed with red. “Wesley, I’m so worried about you.”

He kissed her forehead softly. “Don’t worry. We’ll keep in touch, always.”

Suddenly, Gabriela seemed to recall something. Reaching out her hand, she said, “Where’s the red string bracelet? Give it back to me.”

After their last quarrel, Wesley had reclaimed the red bracelets. Now, he opened the safe, retrieved one, and gently tied it around Gabriela’s wrist.

When she noticed the twin bracelet still resting on his left wrist, a wave of comfort and reassurance washed over her.

From this moment on, she thought, nothing should come between them again.

Chapter 709

The next day, Gabriela accompanied Wesley to the airport, bringing Truett along.

“Wesley, you must come back safely. Truett and I will be waiting at home,” she said softly.

“Okay,” Wesley replied.

Though usually a man of few words, he gathered Gabriela into his arms, then bent to embrace Truett, before turning silently toward the check-in gate.

And so he departed, not to return for quite some time.

The three months originally promised had already come and gone, yet he remained abroad.

Still, the treatment was working, and there was real hope—hope that one day, he might recover fully.

As time passed, Wesley’s calls grew less and less frequent.

Meanwhile, Truett had made remarkable progress. He could now walk steadily for more than ten meters, and his speech was becoming clearer by the day.

After three months of studying design fundamentals, Gabriela discovered that Presley had vanished once more, likely off wandering some scenic destination.

With no other choice, she continued practicing on her own. Moved by her persistence, Lilian often joined her, painting at her side and listening to her frustrations.

“With such an unreliable mentor, you really have to depend on yourself,” Lilian said with a sigh.

If she had known, she would never have entrusted this little apprentice to her daughter.

But Gabriela didn’t see it that way. To her, the foundation Presley had laid was invaluable, far beyond what she could have learned alone.

“I haven’t even fully absorbed all that my mentor has already taught me. There’s a reason she teaches slowly,” Gabriela insisted.

Lilian’s fondness for her deepened at that moment. Smiling warmly, she patted Gabriela’s head and called her a sincere, earnest girl.

Life slipped by in a calm and steady rhythm.

Before Gabriela realized it, two full years had passed.

By then, she had not spoken directly to Wesley in months. Each time she tried calling, it was Myah who answered.

Myah had also traveled to Athea later on.

Under the care of the elderly doctor, her eyesight had almost fully recovered.

Stewart then introduced her to leading ophthalmologists abroad, and with their help, her treatment was nearly complete.

Since she was in the same hospital as Wesley, Myah often visited him. Whenever Wesley was undergoing treatment, she would pick up Gabriela's calls.

"Wesley is getting a check-up." This time, her tone carried a cheerful lilt. "Gabriela, Wesley's health has improved so much. It shouldn't be long before he goes back to you."

Overjoyed, Gabriela asked after her recovery.

“My eyes feel as good as anyone’s now. No pain at all. And don’t worry, I don’t enjoy staring at screens anyway, so I’ll take good care of them...” Myah replied.

After the call, Gabriela began counting down the days, her heart swelling with anticipation for Wesley’s return.

But when the day finally came, no message or call arrived from him.

Instead, it was Myah who reached out. “Wesley’s flight lands in Okburg at 5 p.m. tomorrow. Will you come to meet him?”

In that moment, Gabriela’s joy wavered. Something didn’t feel right.

Why hadn’t Wesley told her himself?

Perhaps he was planning a surprise?

Chapter 710

Gabriela reached the airport earlier than expected.

Landing without delay, the plane brought Wesley into view as he emerged from the VIP passage.

A black trench coat framed his tall build, every sharp line of his face carved in cold precision, carrying a detached elegance that made him impossible to ignore.

Even in a crowd, he was the man who drew every glance.

Two years had slipped by, yet the moment their eyes met, Gabriela's vision blurred with sudden heat. Her lashes trembled, eyes reddening as emotion surged.

Wesley walked alone, no assistant in sight, his suitcase rolling behind him with a steady rhythm. When his gaze caught the woman standing nearby, her eyes shimmering with unshed tears, his brow knit faintly in response.

Forcing down the swell of feeling, Gabriela quickened her pace and broke into a run toward him.

But before she could reach him, a bright, clear voice carried across the terminal. "Slow down, Wesley. I can't keep up with you."

It was none other than Myah.

Turning just enough to look back, he let a subtle smile flicker at his lips. "I'm waiting."

Myah glanced over, spotted Gabriela, and her entire face lit up in delight. "Gabriela!"

Without sparing Wesley a glance, she darted toward Gabriela and seized her hand with giddy enthusiasm. "I can't believe it, Gabriela. I'm really seeing you now!"

Gabriela, though yearning to speak with Wesley, forced herself to remain gracious and smiled warmly at Myah. "Myah, have your eyes healed completely?"

"They've been fine for a while now. I only went to Athea for the last round of treatment." Her gaze lingered on Gabriela, eyes brimming with awe. "You're stunning, Gabriela. Even more gorgeous than in the photos! No wonder Allan was so taken with you back then."

Her unrestrained admiration rang out brightly, making Wesley's frown tighten as he stood behind her.

Awkwardness crept into Gabriela's expression, tightening her smile. "Myah, you've misunderstood. Allan and I were nothing more than friends."

She tried to make it clear, wanting Myah to know there had never been anything between them.

Yet Myah hardly seemed to hear, her gaze fixed on Gabriela's face until it dropped suddenly to the earrings glinting at her ears. "Wait, Gabriela, are those the earrings from Allan? They look good."

At that remark, Wesley's jaw tightened, his expression turning glacial.

Gabriela hurried to correct her, shaking her head. "No, these came from Tessa. Allan never gave me earrings."

"He didn't?" Myah blinked, confusion clouding her tone. "But I'm certain I heard Allan say he'd bought a pair for your birthday."

Knowing how deeply Allan lingered in Myah's heart, Gabriela forced herself to stay calm and gentle, answering with quiet patience. "You might have gotten that wrong."

"No way." Myah shook her head, stubborn and certain. "There has to be such a pair! If not, come with me later to my house—we'll find them."

Gabriela started to tell her it wasn't necessary, but Myah's expression clouded. She lowered her gaze and murmured, "Perhaps something happened with Allan, and he never found the chance to give them."